
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

September 2006

Next meeting – Monday 25 September

at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall

What was life like for the ordinary people in the Civil War? A lot is written about the activists on both sides – hard riding cavaliers and dour roundheads – but the everyday citizen had to put up with appalling disturbance.

The speaker at the society's next open meeting, Malcolm Atkin, of University College, Worcester, has made a special study of the social effects of the conflict. Such aspects as the role of the local militias, the drain on finances (often as a result of thuggish blackmail) and local resistance to the turmoil.

This will be an illustrated talk. Also on display will be some of the results from the dowsing experience day held in May.

Entrance for members is free, for visitors £2. There will be refreshments afterwards.

Another smithy

Marion Percy

Following my article in the last newsletter I am indebted to 2 members for more information about a smithy at Colwall Green. It ties up with the census of 1876 which mentions John Harford, a wheelwright living on Colwall Green, and William Watkins, a blacksmith and shopkeeper.

For sale by auction at the 'Horse and Groom' in 1883 was 'a freehold brick built and substantial detached cottage residence with blacksmith's shop near thereto and large productive garden, in the occupation of Mrs Watkins and Mr Tummy, and also two freehold cottages with gardens adjacent thereto in the occupations of Mr Harford and Mrs James, the whole producing an estimated rental of £30 per annum'. The smithy was probably 'Ralph's Cottage'.

Did you know ...

... there could have been a Windmill at Chances Pitch near the current phone mast. The site is shown as Upper Windmill Field on the 1842 tithe map.

... Dame Laura Knight was not the first artist to visit Colwall. On display by a member at our meeting last year about Park Farm was a picture called 'Old Palace, Colwall' dated about 1910 by the artist *Ernest Arthur Rowe* (1862-1922). Rowe was a great painter of gardens in the late Victorian period. He kept an appointments book called his 'book of wanderings', which is probably amongst diaries and letters in the possession of his descendents.

St. James' Church Inventory

A year's study of the features of Colwall Church by members of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS) will culminate on 5th November when copies of their survey will be handed over at a ceremony and service. Twenty members took part in the survey of such features as memorials, metal, stone and wood work, textiles and windows. They did four months of field work and spent the rest of the time on research, checking dimensions, etc. and compiling the report.

The leader of the group, Mrs Sheila Wright, said it was important that parishioners should know what was in their church. As well as being handed over in the church on 5th November at 4.30 pm – when members of the Village Society will be very welcome, copies of the report are also sent to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and church care and heritage organisations.

One of the unexpected discoveries was a scrap of handwritten paper on the inside back wall of the organ case with a number of prayers, possibly for a service held after work on the new chancel. It dates from 1866.

Recording of monumental inscriptions in the churchyard by Herefordshire Family History Society will continue on **Saturday 28 October**. All help welcomed. For details please contact the co-ordinator Angela Golding [REDACTED]

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Colwall Hill School *by Michael Milne*

This year is the 150th anniversary of the opening of the school in Upper Colwall. The cutting of the road through the Wyche in 1836 encouraged the establishment of a 'Hill' community in Upper Colwall. The school was built about 1856 at the instigation of the Rector, the Reverend Frederick Custance, and described as one for boys and girls at 'the Wytch'. The building was built of local stone with an imposing belfry above the front entrance and had a small playground to the side. Prior to 1960 when electricity was installed, the school was heated by solid fuel stoves, and lit by gas lamps

The school was licensed by the Bishop of Hereford for use both as a church and a parish school. The main schoolroom was used as a chapel for Anglican worship, and called The Wyche School Church of the Good Shepherd. On Sundays, the main hall was re-arranged with seating for 70 persons together with an altar and pulpit. In 1910, the new Church of the Good Shepherd opened and this meant that the school was no longer required to be used for Sunday services.

It appears that up to about 1900, there was a mixed entry (infants and upper school for boys and girls) with average attendances of about 70. Thereafter the 'upper school' only admitted girls, although there was a brief period during the First World War when boys were again also admitted, but this did not continue after 1917.

Not much information is available for the first years of the school's life, but from 1906 until its closure we have the Head Teachers' logbooks – meticulously prepared on a daily basis. Whether due to poor diet, housing, sanitation or other causes the children seemed to be prone to many illnesses. As well as common coughs and colds, there were annual outbreaks of infectious diseases including diphtheria, impetigo, measles, German

measles, mumps, whooping cough, chicken pox and scarlet fever. One pupil unfortunately died of diphtheria. Attendances fluctuated considerably as a result, particularly in the winter months. Medical Officers of Health kept a watchful eye on these matters and closures of a week or more were ordered to prevent the spread of infection. School dentists inspected the children's teeth on a regular basis and often extractions took place in the school. Attendances were also made difficult in the winter months by regular heavy snowfalls accompanied by icy roads, and often caused the school either to close or to abandon its timetable.

Normal school holidays at Easter, Whitsuntide and Christmas were taken. The summer holidays were unusually split into two periods with the second part extending well into mid September to allow the children to go hop picking. It was not uncommon for children to delay their return for several days if the hop-picking season was extended!

On 1st November 1922, the current roll of 50 children was drastically reduced to 15. The majority of the older children were transferred to the Colwall Green Girls' School or to the Lower Wyche School. Thereafter the school was referred to as a 'Junior School' but only took infants with attendances of between 20 and 30.

Generally, the life of the school was uneventful except when the lavatories were blown down in a gale, the roof was damaged and a window blown out by a German bomb, the air raid shelter collapsed into a large hole in the playground, the coal house caught fire, a visit to Colwall Station to see the Queen Mother depart in the Royal train (1960) and the collapse of the belfry.

Unfortunately, due to decline in numbers, the school closed in 1982 and is now a private dwelling.

Contributions, corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome.

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or c/o Colwall Library
